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AUTHOR Richard, Dinah Daniel
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ABSTRACT

Noting the growing number of foreign students in colleges in the United States, this paper argues that communication educators should devote more discussion to the development of oral proficiency in those students. This paper (1) discusses the significance of the problem facing educators and foreign students, (2) examines the language training of foreign students prior to their admission to colleges in the U. S., (3) presents guidelines for minimal competencies in speaking and listening that can be used as a basis for a communication course for foreign students, and (4) illustrates how the guidelines can be applied. (FL)

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"Foreign Students at American Colleges: Guidelines for Minimal Competencies in Speech Communication"

by

Dinah Daniel Richard

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The Speech Communication Association has given new impetus recently to the redefining of literacy. In the "COMM CAPS" column of the September, 1977 issue of Communication Education, Barbara Lieb-Brilhart has suggested that "To be literate in reading and writing is indeed beneficial, but those processes isolated from speaking and listening will not facilitate survival in the twentieth century." In response to a call for a new look into the subject of literacy, Communication Education has devoted the entire November, 1978 issue to redefining literacy and the basics. The instructional practices section of the edition has introduced to readers the importance of discovering the needs of different ranges of students, including international students in higher education.[1] As the exploration of the topic continues, communication educators should devote more discussion to the development of oral proficiency in foreign students, a group that is growing in number and overall proportion. The purpose of this paper is (1) to acquaint the audience with the significance of the problem facing international learners and educators, (2) to explain the language training of foreign students prior to admission to colleges, (3) to present guidelines for minimal competencies in speaking and listening that can be used as a basis for a communication course for non-native speakers of English in higher education, and (4) to illustrate application of the guidelines.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM

For the academic year 1954-55, American colleges and universities reported an enrollment of 34,232 foreign students (holding a type F or J visa or refugee status). In 1978-79, there were 263,938 international learners in 2,752 such institutions. Although the rate of increase for enrollment of American students is tapering off, the rate for the entrance of foreign students is increasing each year; between 1977-78 and 1978-79 alone, there was a 12% jump.[2] The need to help these students is apparent--yet only three out of ten public school teachers of non-native speakers have had even one course in teaching English as a second language.[3] The percentage of trained communication instructors for such students in higher education is probably less.

Professional organizations (such as Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, commonly called TESOL) have formed to help in the development of linguistic competence for these learners. However, educators in these associations have realized that linguistic competence is not enough to prepare international students to function in our environment. TESOL members have called for activities that will enhance communication competence, as reflected in the following pleas:

> The "missing link" in our English instruction is a method that will adequately bridge the gap between drill situations in the classroom and actual communication situations outside the classroom.[4]

> Most books on English teaching methodology concentrate on the manipulative phase of language teaching--the phase in which students learn basic language structure through drills and exercises. Almost no guidance, however, is available to teachers in the communicative phase of language teaching....[5]

listening but not speaking,[9] most language institutes recognize the important role speech plays in pursuit of communicative competence. Consequently, the institutes include conversation classes, representing 15% of the curricular emphasis.[10] When foreign students pass the TOEFL, leave the institutes, and are admitted to colleges, they are equipped with the basic linguistic skills and, to a lesser degree, communicative skills.

Upon entrance to colleges though, many international students who have realized their limited oral abilities enroll in fundamental speech courses. However, the regular lower division speech courses, stressing competencies in occupational, citizenship, and maintenance situations,[11] are geared to the level of native speakers of English. Foreign students in American colleges are faced with persistent problems in educational, preservative, and social circumstances.[12] Because these differences exist, communication educators should develop specialized functional courses, methods, and materials to meet the unique needs of this non-traditional population. To accomplish these goals, guidelines for minimal competencies in speaking and listening must be established.

MINIMAL COMPETENCIES

Analysis of communication competency has revealed numerous points of confusion and disagreement. The earliest exploration of the subject has been attributed to Noam Chamsky's competence/performance dichotomy (what we know how to do as opposed to what we actually do),[13] based on de Saussure's "la langue" and

> ...students who study a foreign language in the classroom environment generally fail to reach the goal of genuine communication....teachers do not teach it... teachers do not test it...teachers do not know how to do it.[6]

Indeed, speech communication is a field to assist in the development of communication competence in foreign students. Because these students are already enrolled in our area, speech instructors must become better equipped to deal with the addition. At the 1979 SCA convention in San Antonio, teachers attending an action caucus and short course entitled "Communication Competence for the Non-Native Speaker of English" requested special methodology and materials. For this task to be accomplished, educators must first understand the language training of foreign students prior to admission to colleges.

LANGUAGE TRAINING

Before entering their respective colleges or universities, foreign students must pass the Test of English as a Second Language (TOEFL). To prepare for it, learners who have not studied English in their home countries usually enroll in one of the language institutes located in 648 U.S. colleges, universities, or other agencies. Such an institute is frequently called "English Language and Orientation Program," "English Language Institute," "Intensive English Program," "English as a Second Language," or "English as a Foreign Language."[7] Because the TOEFL emphasizes grammar and reading, the institutes stress these items accordingly.[8] Although the TOEFL assesses

"la parole."[14] Chomsky's system has many shortcomings; as Munby points out, his "restriction of the concept of competence to the perfect knowledge of an ideal speaker-listener, in a homogeneous speech community, unaffected by sociocultural or psychological constraints, cannot account for the communication function of languages."[15] Recognizing these pitfalls, many educators have searched for theories that "can deal with a heterogeneous speech community, differential competence, (and) the constitutive role of sociocultural features."[16]

In addition to the failure of some theorists to take into account the diverse sociocultural variables affecting competence, many writers overlook the impact that age has on acquisition of proficiency. Speech communication educators[17] have found Connolly and Bruner's model[18] useful in describing competence in children. But, as Larson notes, the conclusions about children do not hold true for adults, whose "relevant aspects of communicative competence broaden," whose "contexts become more diverse," whose sample items are more varied, and whose "judgment of competence/ noncompetence becomes much more difficult." Larson suggests that "as conceived presently, the construct has less and less utility as the individuals we are describing get older and older." He then asks "Why could not the competence perspective be employed in describing adults...?"[19]

In the same issue of Communication Education that Larson raises this question, an answer is given in the article entitled

"The Basics in Speaking and Listening for High School Graduates: What Should Be Assessed?"[20] The findings of the SCA Task Force, cited in the article, concluded that adults use speaking and listening skills to achieve three main purposes, including:

1. occupational--to be a contributing member of society an individual should be able to obtain a job, learn job requirements, and perform job tasks adequately.
2. citizenship--the continuation of our form of government is dependent upon a citizen's ability to understand, discuss, evaluate laws, governmental policy and the views of other citizens, and to express his/her viewpoint.
3. maintenance--maintaining oneself and family requires that adults form and preserve social relationships, manage personal finances, perform consumer tasks, gain and preserve health, avoid injury, and participate in family life and child raising.

This classification is useful in describing the needs of American citizens but not the needs of international learners. The category of "citizenship"is not applicable since foreign students by definition hold temporary visas. The "occupational" division is insignificant too because only 3.6% of foreign students depend on employment as their primary source of income while attending school.[21] Of the three categories cited, only "maintenance" is pertinent. Since it is extremely relevant, it should be divided into two main areas and developed further. For purposes of this paper, the term "preservation" will be utilized to describe a group consisting of non-social matters of maintenance, such as performing consumer tasks. The word "social" will refer to other maintenance functions, including interpersonal relationships between foreign students and their classmates, roommates, friends, etc. A third category, not found in the SCA classification, is "educational," which will describe a category used directly in pursuit of university

studies.

The SCA Task Force's list of competencies (see the two columns on the left hand of Appendix A) is useful in establishing a vertical dimension of a matrix. The occupational, citizenship, and maintenance headings can be replaced with educational, preservative, and social headings, thus forming a horizontal dimension. Together, the two dimensions produce a chart outlining guidelines for minimal competencies in speaking and listening for international learners (see Appendix A).

Having formulated a classification of competencies for a special adult population of non-native speakers of English, application of the guidelines may be explored.

APPLICATION

Having established two dimensions of the matrix, instructors must determine which particular speech acts will be included for study or, in other words, which examples for application will be included in the three columns on the right hand side of the chart (see Appendix A). In the past two decades, Joos,[22] Ervin-Tripp,[23] Gregory,[24] Crystal and Davy,[25] Hymes,[26] Richterich,[27] and Candlin, Bruton, and Leather[28] have presented various categories relevant to the study of communication needs. However, until Munby's publication of Communicative Syllabus Design, no work has been comprehensive enough to utilize the findings. Munby is particularly interested in English for special purposes (ESP), a focus in the area of what is now called communicative syllabus

design and materials production. As he points out, "This area... has lacked a system for drawing up appropriate syllabus specifications based on adequate profiles of communication needs." He resolves the problem through a creation of a processing model[29] (see Figure 1) that can serve as a starting point for our application of the matrix.

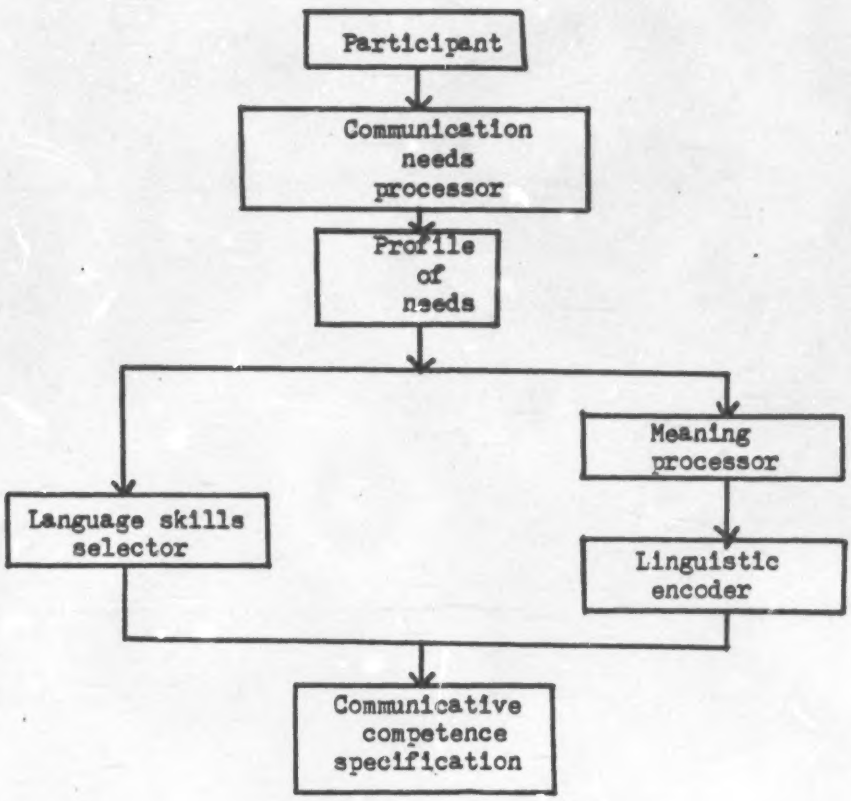

Figure 1. Model for specifying communicative competence

I. Participant

The first step in the model requires specification of the identity and language of the participant. The identity of the participant should include age, sex, nationality, and place of residence, information relevant when it is matched with the identity of members of the participant's role set (see interaction) and placed in spatial context (see setting). The data concerning language specifies the participant's target language and the extent of his command of it, and the mother tongue and the extent of such command.

II. Communication needs processor

The second step in the model is "Communication needs processor,"[30] which can be clarified through an elaborate flow chart (see Figure 2).

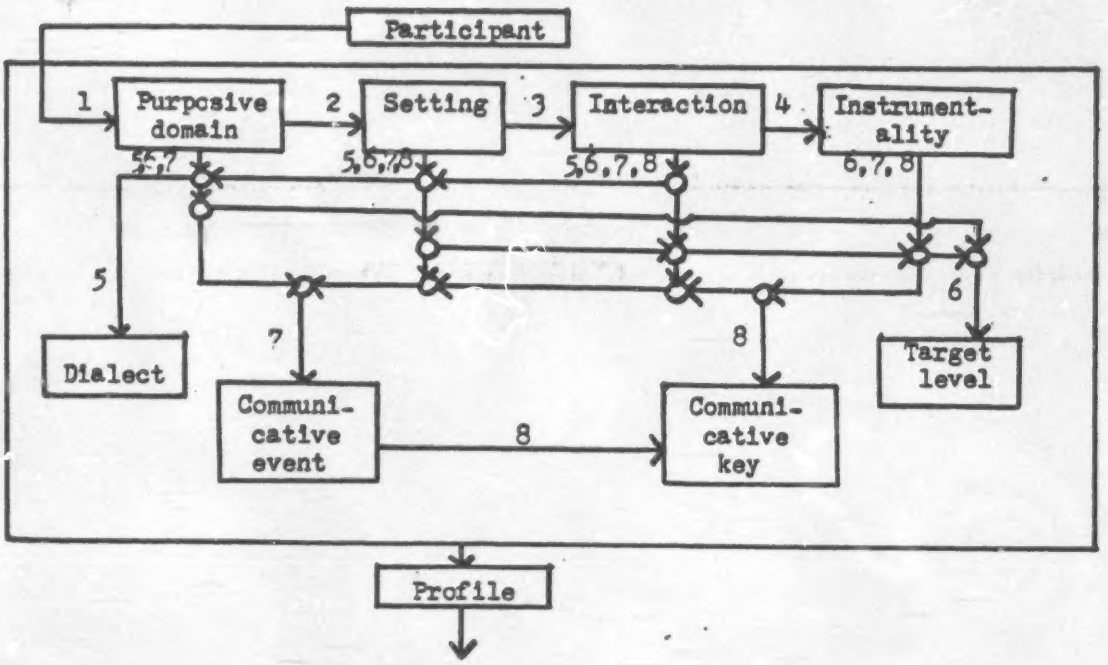

Figure 2. Communication needs processor

The first four variables in the processor are the a priori parameters: purposive domain, setting, interaction, and instrumentality.

a. Purposive domain

In the purposive domain, the instructor establishes the type of ESP (English for Specific Purposes). The SCA Task Force set up the three purposes of occupation citizenship, and maintenance.[31] Munby specifies either occupation or education.[32] However, as discussed in this paper under "Minimal Competencies," the most appropriate purposes for international learners in higher education are educational, preservative, and social.

b. Setting

This parameter considers the physical and psychosocial setting, as described by Hymes.[33] Spatial and temporal aspects of the physical setting must be recognized, and the different environments (such as noisy, demanding, etc.) of psychosocial setting must be considered.

c. Interaction

This variable identifies with whom the participant must communicate in the target language and the relationship between the communicators. The position, role-set, role-set identity, role relationship, and social relationship must be specified.

d. Instrumentality

This variable is concerned with constraints upon encoding or decoding in terms of the medium, mode, and channel of communication.

Having examined the a priori variables of the processor, the a posteriori aspects can be explored, as the participant is now in a position to process the input.

e. Dialect

Although Munby also considers whether to specify British or American English dialect, the main dimensions to be concerned with are regional/nonregional and matters of social class and temporal dialect.

f. Target level

The participant's target level of command should be stated in terms of that which will guide him/her through the model. Level is a determinant, not an objective. The dimensions of level are: size, complexity, range, delicacy, speed, and flexibility. Certain conditions must be placed on the dimensions, including: error, stylistic failure, reference, repetition, and hesitancy.

g. Communicative event

This parameter is concerned with what the participant has to do productively or receptively. The events consist of communicative activities and subject matter.

h. Communicative key

This parameter is concerned with how (manner) one does the activity comprising an event (what one does). A taxonomy of attitudes consisting of bipolar adjectives (i.e. happy--unhappy) along continua can be used to indicate the communicative key. Study of intonation patterns must be included.

III. Profile of Needs

Having completed an analysis of the processor described in figure 2, we have derived a profile of the communication needs of a particular participant or category of participants. Sociolinguistic variables have been taken into account. The pre-language stage of communicative competence is complete. Target language specification can now be explored.

IV. Language Skills Selector

Although it is common to see statements about the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, rarely is there a communicative context that is restricted to just one of these skills. Munby[34] lists two hundred and sixty skill subcategories in fifty-four groups. These categories overlap with the categories in the left-hand column of the matrix (see Appendix A). Because Munby's list can help to subdivide SCA's broad headings, his system should be used to supplement the matrix when developing materials.

V. Meaning Processor

The meaning processor develops the semantic component of the target language. While an English teacher would spend more time in class enhancing the students understanding of the notional, referential, sociolinguistic, and contextual meaning, the speech communication instructor should not neglect this step in the model by assuming that the student's vocabulary is fully developed. As speech communication theorists and educators continue to explore functional/rhetorical/speech acts, they can benefit from the knowledge offered in psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics.

VI. Linguistic encoding

Now that the encoding stage has been reached, we must consider the criterion for our decisions as to appropriacy. The native speaker is able to use introspection and subjective judgment, but the foreign student is unable to do this. Ideally, the second language learner would like to have an objective source (i.e. dictionary) to turn to, but no such reference exists. Even though there have been many descriptive studies analyzing varities of English in different professions,[35] the instructor will have to be somewhat subjective as he/she tries to describe distinctive features, rules of use, co-occurence and distributional characteristics which relate to micro-functions and language skills under consideration.

CONCLUSION

This paper has explored (1) the significance of the problem facing international learners and educators, (2) the language training of foreign students prior to admission to colleges, (3) guidelines for minimal competencies in speaking and listening for foreign students in higher education, and (4) application of the guidelines. Although the paper has covered the topics superficially, the discussion has provided a starting point for further analysis of communicative competence. Failure to begin with such an exploration will result in failure to meet the needs of learners. As Munby notes,[36]

> In trying out this part of the model on a group of teachers of ESP (English for Special Purposes), it was noticeable how some of them, in their questioning, kept on trying to make the CNP (communication needs processor) deal with the language itself. This is indicative of both a widespread failure to understand the nature of communication needs (or to distinguish between them and their linguistic realisations) and also a premature insistence on getting down to the target language specification. Syllabus specification in ESP can take place after the prior and necessary work has been done on needs, or it will not be known whether or to what extent the specification is appropriate. Misunderstanding the nature of communication needs also shows itself when matters of logistics or pedagogy are included as variables in the consideration of the participants' communication needs. For example, the number of teachers available, the intensity of length of the course, financial considerations, the learner's attitude to teachers, and his previous learning methods, are all important factors for consideration in the organisation of the programme and the construction of the materials, but they are irrelevant to the specification of what the learner needs the target language for, which is what comprises his communication needs.

Hopefully, speech communication instructors of foreign students will not face the same dilemma confronting other educators. Although our field is underdeveloped in speech materials for international learners, perhaps we will be able to proceed in the proper sequence, basing our output on theoretical findings.

Endnotes

[1] Thomas Buckingham and Lawrence E. Rosenfeld, The Conversant Program and the Development of Communicative Competence," Communication Education, November, 1978, pp. 349-354.

[2] Open Doors, 1978-79 (New York: Institute of International Education, 1980), pp. 1-2

[3] Dorothy Waggoner, "Non-English Language Background Persons: Three U.S. Surveys," TESOL Quarterly, September, 1978, p. 247.

[4] John E. Garner and Noel W. Schutz, "The Missing Link in Our English Instruction," Journal of English as a Second Lanugage, Spring, 1969.

[5] Julia M. Dobson, Effective Techniques for English Conversation Groups (Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House Publishers, 1974), p. vix.

[6] Rebecca Valette, "Developing and Evaluating Communicative Skills in the Classroom," Master Lecture Series on Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (Defense Language Institute, Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, 1973).

[7] English Language and Orientation Programs in the United States (New York: Institute of International Education, 1978) p. ii.

[8] Holly Jacobs and Janet Constantinides, "ESL in the Rocky Mountain West and Southwest: Programs, Problems and Prioritier," ESL in Higher Education, vol. 2, no. 1, p. 5.

[9] A portion is being developed to assess speaking.

[10] Jacobs.

[11] Ronald E. Bassett, Nilwon Whittington, and Ann Staton-Spicer, "The Basics in Speaking and Listening for High School Graduates: What Should Be Assessed?" Communication Education, November, 1978, p. 296.

[12] Mary Finocchiaro, Teaching English as a Second Language (New York: Harper and Row, 1969).

[13] Noam Chomsky, Aspects of the Theory of Syntax (Cambridge, Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press, 1965), chapter 1.

[14] F. de Saussure, Cours de Linguistique General (Paris, 1916).

[15] John Munby, Communicative Syllabus Design (London: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 14-15.

[16] Dell Hymes, "On Communicative Competence," in Pride and Holmes, eds., Sociolinguistics (Baltimore: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1972).

[17] see R. R. Allen and Barbara Sundene Wood, "Beyond Reading and Writing to Communication Competence," Communication Education, November, 1978, pp. 286-292.

[18] Kevin J. Connolly and Jerome S. Bruner, The Growth of Competence (New York: Academic Press, 1974), pp. 3-7.

[19] Carl E. Larson, "Problems in Assessing Functional Communication," Communication Education, November, 1978, pp. 304-309.

[20] Bassett.

[21] Open Doors, p. 28.

[22] Martin Joos, The Five Clocks (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1961).

[23] Susan Ervin-Tripp, "An Analysis of the Interaction of Language, Topic, and Listener," in M. Argyle, ed., Social Encounters (Baltimore: Penguin, 1973).

[24] Michael Gregory, "Aspects of Varieties Differentiation," Journal of Linguistics, vol. 3, no. 2.

[25] David Crystal and Derek Davy, Investigating English Style (New York: Longman, 1969).

[26] Hymes.

[27] R. Richterich, "A Model for the Definition of Adult Language Needs," CDC/EES (72) 49.

[28] C.N. Candlin, C.J. Bruton, and J.H. Leather, "Doctors in Casualty: Applying Communicative Competence to Components of Specialist Course Design," IRAL, vol. 14, no. 3.

[29] Munby, p. 31.

[30] Munby, p. 33.

[31] Bassett.

[32] Munby, p. 35 and pp. 54-60.

[33] Dell Hymes, "Models of the Interaction of Language and Social Life," in Gumperz and Hymes, eds., Directions in Sociolinguistics (New York: Holt, Rinehart, 1972).

[34] Munby, pp. 123-131.

[35] Munby, p. 49. He cites various studies in professions but concludes that no reference source exists to assist the student who seeks objectivity.

[36] Munby, p. 40.

COMPETENCY		EXAMPLES FOR APPLICATION		
		EDUCATIONAL	PRESERVATIVE	SOCIAL
I. COMMUNICATION CODES: This set deals with minimal abilities in encoding and decoding verbal and nonverbal communication	A. Listen well to spoken English	Understand directions given orally by the instructor	Understand doctor's directions for taking medicine	Understand conversation with a friend
	B. Decode nonverbal cues accurately	Understand the teacher's gestures	Understand gestures given by a policeman	Understand the differences in social and intimate proximity
	C. Use words, pronunciations, and grammar correctly	Use appropriate words when talking to the teacher	Use language understood by the telephone operator	Use informal language with friends
	D. Use nonverbal signs correctly	Use proper distance when talking to advisor	Use appropriate gestures when describing ailments to doctors	Use handshakes appropriately
	E. Use voice effectively	Use sufficient volume when speaking in class	Use clarity when talking to customs officials	Use proper volume in social gatherings
. ORAL MESSAGE EVALUATION: This set involves skills that include the use of standards of appraisal to make judgments about oral messages or their effects	A. Identify main ideas in messages	Recognize important details in a lecture	Recognize main details in a news broadcast	Recognize the details of a social invitation
	B. Distinguish facts from opinions	Distinguish facts from teacher's opinions	Distinguish obligations of and preferences of landlords	Distinguish promises and advice of friends
	C. Distinguish information from persuasion	Distinguish regulations from advice given by advisor	Distinguish facts from opinions in newspapers	Distinguish facts from opinions of friends
	D. Recognize when another does not understand your message	Recognize when the instructor does not understand you	Recognize when the postman does not understand you	Recognize when your roommate does not understand you